

# Oregon

DEPARTMENT OF  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
QUALITY

NORTHWEST REGION

August 25, 1997

ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR  
CRAWFORD STREET CORP  
c/o SCHNITZER STEEL IND  
3200 NW YEON AVE  
PORTLAND, OR 97210

RE: 1997 Sediment Investigation-Lower Willamette River  
(River Miles 3.5 to 9)  
ECSI #2068

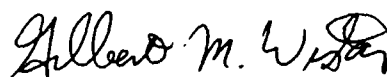
Dear Environmental Coordinator:

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are conducting a joint investigation of sediment contamination in the Portland Harbor section of the Willamette River, from Swan Island (river mile 9) downstream to near the tip of Sauvie Island (river mile 3.5). The purpose of this investigation is to identify areas with significant sediment contamination and to determine what further actions may be appropriate in these areas. EPA is participating in this investigation at the request of DEQ and will provide contractor assistance in sample collection. I am contacting you because our records indicate that you own riverfront property within the study area. Roy F. Weston, Inc., a contractor for EPA, will be collecting samples of river-bottom sediments in September and October 1997, and DEQ staff will be participating in a portion of this sampling. More information about the project, including a fact sheet and a "question and answer" discussion, are included as attachments to this letter.

If you lease all or part of your property to other parties, you may wish to notify these parties about the project.

I encourage you to review the enclosed materials. If after reading them you have any questions about this joint investigation, feel free to contact me at (503)229-5512. Note that through the month of October, the EPA Region 10 project officer will be David Bennett, at (206)553-2103. John Meyer, shown on the fact sheet as the EPA contact, will return November 1.

Sincerely,



Gil Wistar, Project Manager  
DEQ Site Assessment Program

John A. Kitzhaber  
Governor



Attachments: Fact Sheets and Q&A

2020 SW Fourth Avenue  
Suite 400  
Portland, OR 97201-4987  
(503) 229-5263 Voice  
TTY (503) 229-5471  
DEQ-1

USEPA SF



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## 1997 DEQ AND EPA ASSESSMENT OF SEDIMENT CONTAMINATION IN THE LOWER WILLAMETTE

Do contaminated sediments in the lower Willamette River pose threats to human health and the environment? The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are beginning to answer this question with a limited investigation of sediments in the most industrialized portion of the Willamette. The map on the back of this sheet shows the 5.5-mile study area, between Swan Island and the tip of Sauvie Island. Work on this project, funded by EPA Region 10-Seattle at an estimated cost of \$200,000, began in April 1997. Project coordinators expect to collect samples this fall and report findings and conclusions by early 1998.

DEQ's and EPA's objectives for this investigation are to:

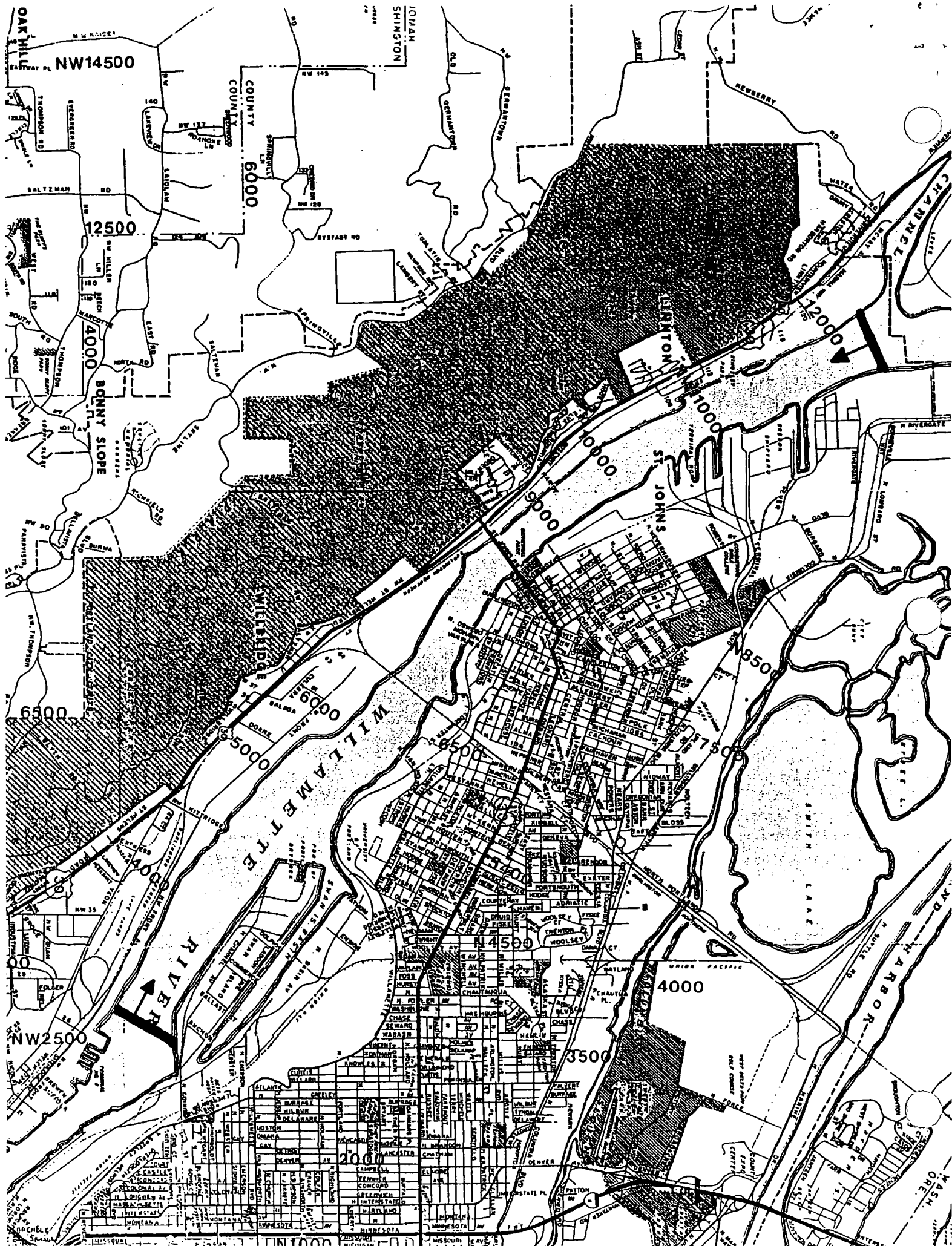
1. Summarize existing sediment data and identify "gaps" in this data;
2. Collect sediment samples from the areas of greatest concern;
3. Identify sources or potential sources of sediment contamination; and
4. Prepare a report documenting study findings and identifying further action needs.

Sediment sampling is planned for September/October 1997, a time when seasonally low river flows will permit relatively easy access to river-bottom sediments. The project team will use a boat to collect samples from state-owned property along both sides of the river. It is anticipated that a combination of 3-foot sediment cores and shallow grab samples will be collected. Sample analyses may include any or all of the following hazardous substances: toxic metals, including tributyl tin; polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs); polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs); pesticides/herbicides; and other compounds.

In planning for this study, the project team has obtained input from agencies and organizations with expertise in the lower Willamette River, such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Oregon Division of State Lands, the Port of Portland, the Portland Bureau of Environmental Services, Portland State University, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey. Although funding limitations preclude a comprehensive evaluation of sediments along the entire 5.5-mile study area, the project team is hoping that its final report will be a springboard for further studies and in-depth investigations.

**Contacts:** DEQ contact for this project is Gil Wistar, (503) 229-5512; EPA-Seattle contact is John Meyer, (206) 553-1271.





## ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DEQ/EPA LOWER WILLAMETTE RIVER SEDIMENT STUDY

*Q. What made DEQ decide to do this in the first place? And why now -- wouldn't it be better to wait for more resources for a more comprehensive effort?*

The Willamette River is an important natural resource in the Portland area, providing habitat for fish and wildlife, recreation for boaters and swimmers, fish for human consumption, and aesthetic values to all citizens of the area. It is also the lifeblood of commerce in the region, and for these and other reasons, it should be respected and protected as much as possible.

In 1996, DEQ began reviewing data from previous sediment sampling at individual locations along the lower Willamette River. Different parties had conducted these sampling events at different times for many different purposes, and the quality of the data varied. As a result, it was difficult to compare results from these previous studies. Nevertheless, because some of this data indicated the presence of significant contamination in downstream river sediments, DEQ considered it a high priority to begin evaluating this stretch of the river. DEQ subsequently learned that EPA had limited funding available in 1997 for such a project, but not enough for a comprehensive environmental health assessment of even a portion of the river. Since EPA could not guarantee funding in future years, DEQ chose to move ahead with a limited project focus rather than wait for the possibility of more money in an uncertain federal funding environment. Despite the study's limited scope, the final report is expected to provide a basis for further investigations by DEQ, EPA, and other interested parties.

*Q. How will this work affect me as a riverfront property owner or operator?*

The project team will collect samples from a boat over an approximately 20-day period in September and October 1997. Although sampling will take place near each bank of the river rather than towards the middle of the river, the project team will do everything possible to avoid disrupting normal operations at your facility during this time. We're aware that many riverfront property owners and operators in the project area are already working with DEQ to investigate and clean up contamination at their sites; we will continue to coordinate closely with the individual DEQ project managers for these sites to avoid duplication of effort during the sediment study.

If significant contamination is found in sediments adjacent to your site, this information will be passed on to the DEQ project manager (if the site is active in our Cleanup Program). Should significant contamination be found in sediments adjacent to a site not active in our Cleanup Program, DEQ or EPA may follow up as needed to find the source(s) of this contamination.

***Q. Why stop at Swan Island? Why not go upstream to Oregon City?***

DEQ selected the area between Swan Island and the tip of Sauvie Island because this portion of the Willamette River has a long history of heavy industrial use. DEQ initially considered going further upstream, but decided not to do so, because enlarging the project area without having funds to increase the number of samples would have resulted in unacceptable spacing (too great a distance) between sample points. Therefore, given the project budget and the importance of developing meaningful data, DEQ chose to go upstream to about River Mile 9. Again, we expect that data and conclusions from this project will be a springboard for further studies, possibly including sediment evaluations along other sections of the river.

***Q. What's the purpose of testing sediments? Will DEQ or EPA be testing fish or other organisms in the study? What about contamination in the water?***

Many hazardous substances, including those that float on the water when first released, settle and accumulate in river-bottom sediments. As a result, data from sediments indicate the degree of contamination in various parts of the river. Furthermore, some organisms at the lower end of the food chain reside in bottom sediments and can accumulate toxic substances in their tissues, so it's important to assess the level of contamination in their "homes." Because of funding limitations, this project will not include samples of sediment-dwelling (benthic) organisms, fish, or surface water. Data from biological and water samples are important ingredients in assessing the overall environmental health of the lower Willamette River, but the first step should be determining where high concentrations ("hot spots") of contamination are, and that is a primary objective of this study.

***Q. What will happen after this initial study? How will findings be used?***

A report documenting study findings will be completed early in 1998 and will be made available to all interested parties. DEQ will use study findings to: 1) identify the highest-priority areas for further investigation; and 2) evaluate potential sources of any hot spots that are found. In addition, depending on available funding, DEQ may coordinate with EPA Region 10 on follow-up investigations in the project area or conduct similar studies along different stretches of the river. We anticipate that other agencies and organizations may use our findings as guidance in their own follow-up investigations, possibly involving deeper sediment sampling, sediment transport studies, testing of fish and other organisms from contaminated areas, or surface water sampling.